

THE DIAMOND CIPHER

A BASEBALL ROMANCE

By W. A. PHELON

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Secret Service Chief Wilkins, puzzled over the theft of the Government's cipher, calls to his aid Detective Pinkwell. They think they have discovered a new cipher, when the office boy, Brockett, tells them it's "The Diamond Cipher" and starts for the ball park.

CHAPTER II—Brockett, Chula, Lon Kan, a Siamese, Ramon Solano, a Cuban, together with some twenty other youngsters practice baseball playing until dark. One of Wilkins' stenographers is seen to pass a paper to mysterious stranger.

CHAPTER III—As outcome of Brockett's cipher, the ball player and Solano are engaged by government for mysterious mission. Yashimoto, mysterious Jap, calls on Brockett.

CHAPTER IV—Brockett falls into Yashimoto's trap, a fight follows. Brockett coming out on top; Messenger McKane coming to rescue.

CHAPTER V—McKane was bearer of the mysterious cipher; is also a ball player.

CHAPTER VI—Yashimoto returns to headquarters and reports his failure to obtain the cipher to Baron Zollner; Miss Lawson, the stenographer, also reports to the Baron.

CHAPTER VII—Brockett and Solano have encounter with the Baron in which the latter comes out second best.

CHAPTER VIII—Brockett and Solano arrive in Jersey City; make appointment to meet McGinnity, the "Iron Man," baseball manager.

CHAPTER IX—Brockett and Solano arrive in New York and run into a Chinese Tong war; rescued by a white man.

CHAPTER X—The place of refuge found to be a trap; find themselves prisoners of Yashimoto. Kelly to rescue, mauls Jap out of \$10,000.

CHAPTER XI—Kelly turns the money over to Brockett.

CHAPTER XII—Brockett and Solano have encounter with tough gang, but are protected by Kelly's men.

CHAPTER XIII—On sleeper Cleveland-bound; the Baron detected in act of rifling Solano's berth, jumps from train.

CHAPTER XIV—At Detroit the messengers go to ball game, receive hieroglyphs in mysterious manner and depart for Chicago.

CHAPTER XV—Arriving in Chicago, the messengers are robbed by a "ransom thief"; the Baron again appears.

CHAPTER XVI—The Baron offers to assist in recovering the stolen papers.

CHAPTER XVII—The Messengers find the stolen papers in the possession of a giant negro.

CHAPTER XVIII—After a fierce battle with negroes Brockett and Solano wake up in jail.

CHAPTER XIX—The Messengers and police visit the Tenderloin in search of the stolen property.

CHAPTER XX—The thief is found in a "hop joint"; a fight follows; and part of the "booty" is recovered.

CHAPTER XXI—Mysteriously receiving another hieroglyphic message, the messengers board a train for the West and are later arrested by bogus Arkansas sheriff.

CHAPTER XXII—Brockett and Solano knock the sheriff and his deputies down and his deputies down and take to the woods.

"Good idea, boy. Good idea," chuckled the sheriff. "I'll do it. Do it right away."

And a few hours later, various highly valued documents, papers that would cause tremendous stirrings in the land of the Black Eagle, were en route to Washington. The sheriff, by way of good measure and variety, presented the boys with a set of the photographic duplicates, kept a set himself, and sent still another set to official friends in Chicago. As to the Baron: He raved. He called heaven and the infernal regions alike to witness that dire calamities would descend upon the United States, the state of Arkansas, the city of Little Rock, and the hardy sheriff, unless his papers were returned and all duplicates destroyed. Whereupon the sheriff, apparently but little frightened, had the Baron photographed while at the height of his oratory, and presented the boys with souvenir copies of the proofs.

Late in the evening, somewhat refreshed by the hospitality of the sheriff, the boys resumed their journey. The sheriff himself escorted them to the train, and with him came Pod Morgan, owner of the bloodhounds baffled by the pepper trick a few short hours before. Mr. Morgan showed no resentment against the youngsters, and even insisted on sending a young hound to the home address of each one—"a dawg," as Mr. Morgan stated it, "that'll be a real comfort to yore family, an' will be mighty useful when it comes tuh keepin' foreign snakes

from traipsin' 'roun' yo' premises." Several of Mr. Morgan's famous bloodhounds were with him and the boys learned, with astonishment, that the dreaded man-tracker was rather small, measly-looking creatures, not large enough or powerful enough to make a good fight against a bull-terrier, and answering in no description the stories or the pictures which pass current in all literature.

"Real bloodhounds," explained Mr. Morgan, grinningly, "has come tuh be nothin' but show dawgs, with long ears that'd git cotched in the brambles in a minnit. Yuh turn a pack of real bloodhounds loose after a man, an' they'd all sit down on their tails an' yell right helpless. Real, genuine, man-catchin' dawgs is a wuss mixture than Injun an' nigger—but they can foller, an' they can find."

"They don't look," ventured Solano, "as if they would tear a man to pieces when they caught him."

Mr. Morgan and the sheriff bawled long and loud.

"No, son, they don't look that way, and they ain't," gurgled the delighted Mr. Morgan. "What's more, there never was no man-eatin' dawgs used ter chase nobody, not even niggers. In the old slavery days, when a nigger run away, the thing to do was tuh catch him, but not tuh kill him. Kill a \$1,000 nigger? Son, that would be plumb idiotic, wouldn't it? The hounds was simply used tuh foller him, locate him, an' make a racket till the hunters could come up an' get the man."

"In Cuba," put in Solano, "the Spaniards used real bloodhounds, and fierce ones too, to run down and kill the Indians."

"Well," assented Mr. Morgan, "that would be plumb diffrunt. An Injun is a diffrunt beast from a nigger. Your nigger was mighty valuable—you had to look out fer his hide. Your Injun was mighty dangerous, an' better dead than livin'." See the difference, sonny? Tell me, whar did you pick up that pepper trick?"

"Cuban scheme," explained Solano. "In the Ten Years' war, my father and his friends threw the Spaniards off the trail a dozen times that way."

"Great idee," quoth Mr. Morgan. "I don't bear you boys the least ill-will."



fer it—but somebody's got tuh make good fer them dawgs, an' I reckon it'll have tuh be the German."

The travelers were accustomed to receiving notes by now and they were hardly surprised when Brockett, as the train moved out, received a small white envelope from the hand of the friendly sheriff.

"Come by mail this afternoon," cried the sheriff as the station receded into distance. "Note to me with it. Note said to give it to you as the train started. Good-bye, boys, and good luck go with you!"

And the note bore, in the same mysterious code, simply these directions: "3BH Fin W W WP Pos Po TC E 2BH PB Po TC TC BA TC Fin TC SB TC W TO W TC Fin AB Po SH."

"Hurry along and look out for trouble," Brockett translated. "I'd risk something that there's plenty of that article still ahead of us."

CHAPTER XXIV.

There isn't much that can be said about certain stretches along the Rio Grande, except that they are undoubtedly those portions of Texas which made a great general declare that if he had that state and the infernal regions at his disposal he'd live in hell and rent out Texas. Mesquite and prickly brush; jungles bisected here and there with thorny trails; habitations almost as scattered and as seldom visible as in the days when the Comanche and the Lipan rode abroad in the land—that is the Rio Grande border. It is an ideal country for smugglers, cattle-thieves and revolutionists, just as it was once the happy hunting ground of the most pernicious red men.

Still, it doesn't much matter what the section of the land may be, or what the scenery may amount to. If it is in these United States—and there is a patch of fairly level ground discernable—there will be a ball game in progress any pleasant afternoon, and the crack of the bat will rouse

the echoes where once the Indian war-whoop scared the birds. Hence it can hardly be considered startling or even remarkable to find good games in full blast upon the Rio Grande—games which may not be played with big



THE BARON RAVED

league skill, but which are filled with liveliness and pepper, loud outcries and troubles for the umpire.

The second game of the great series between the Fourth cavalry and the common citizens promised to be the warmest battle seen on the banks of the big river in several moons. While the cavalry had won the first contest 17 to 9 on heavier hitting, the common citizens—war correspondents and camera artists in the main—had been reinforced the night before the second tussle. Two lithe, snappy youngsters had blown into camp, asserting that they had some small, unimportant business with the commander. As that official had temporary business at San Antonio, the boys had been made welcome and given quarters while awaiting his return. Baseball, of course, had been one of the earliest topics of conversation, and the newcomers showed intense eagerness to break into the game. As anyone outside of army circles was eligible and the common citizens were short-handed, the new arrivals were promptly drafted into service. Brockett was detailed to guard centerfield, while Ramon Solano was listed for third base. Both youngsters, while wild to have at least one day of diversion, were modest and diffident when asked to play, and declared that they didn't want to crowd any other fellows off the team. It was explained, however, that Sanborn, the estimable war correspondent of the New York *Whirl*, had counted himself out with a charley-horse, while Summers, kodakman of the Chicago *Blizzard*, had been stung by a scorpion—not seriously, but squarely on the right wrist, disabling him from further baseball doings. That left two vacancies, and the appearance of the boys was a blessing to the common citizens' array.

Brockett and Solano warmed up with real delight when the teams were summoned to the field. They had found friends—a jovial crowd of newspaper men and photographic experts—and the minor officers of the regiment had likewise extended them a warm welcome. The Polo Grounds, as the troops proudly styled the ball yard, was somewhat humpy in places, and rather diversified with cactus in others, but everybody concerned had seen far worse arenas for the game. Grandstand there was none, but long lines of cracker-boxes, beer cases and brush heaps afforded sitting room, while hundreds of the enthusiastic bugs stood as close to the base lines as they dared. Mexican ranchers, Mexican peons, rurales on short furloughs, "lungers" who had sought that region for their health, and soldiers by the hundred—such was the assembly, and it is doubtful if any ball game ever was played before a more uproarious crowd.

A college man who was directing things for a moving-picture concern went in as pitcher for the common citizens, and seemed fairly capable. He stopped the cavalry hitless for two innings, pop flies and strikeouts quickly disposing of the warriors. The common citizens were equally helpless with the stick. Brockett and Solano, the newcomers, on whom the common citizens were counting for material batting help, failed in the pinch on their first times up. Brockett raised a foul fly to the fat sergeant who was catching, and Solano grounded to a farrier who was playing short.

In the third inning the troopers began to land on the moving-picture man and two hits were followed by a fumble on the part of a contractors' agent, who was covering second. With the bases full, the moving-picture man put on the steam, struck out the chaplain of the regiment—usually a corking good batter—and made the bugler pop to the first baseman. The next man up was the captain of Company

C, a portly gentleman who had struck out on his last previous appearance. He barely grazed the ball and raised a tiny fly that hovered over third.

Solano settled with eager hands for the catch. Just as the ball landed in his glove, the trooper who was coaching at third bellowed, like a foghorn: "The spider! Look out for the tarantula, boy—look out for the spider!"

With a startled yell Solano sprang nimbly backward. The ball fell with a chugging thud and rolled away. Two runs crossed the platter, and the whole regiment gave vent to wild and woolly howls of glee. Solano, a bright crimson suffusing his olive countenance, said never a word, but Brockett, far out, shrieked at the absurdity of the thing.

After this the tide of battle ebbed and flowed. The common citizens began to hit the distinguished marksman who was pitching, and got back those two runs in the fifth inning. They accumulated two more in the sixth, thanks to a neat drive by Brockett, and Solano got some measure of revenge in the seventh when he caught a liner and stepped on third before a runner could get back. The cavalry rallied in the eighth, but could push in only one man. They turned into the ninth with the score 4 to 3 in favor of the common citizens, and the audience rooting like wild men.

The moving-picture man fed the first batsman a high, fast ball, and it whizzed past first for two bases. A strikeout disposed of the next man, while the next drew four balls. The chaplain came up, tried to catch the infield napping with a bunt, and was thrown out at first, leaving men on third and second, with two down.

CHAPTER XXV.

It doesn't take long for a crowd of husky athletes to traverse the distance between the home plate and centerfield. As Brockett disappeared behind the mesquite, half a dozen ball players, with a yell of surprise and rage, dashed across the diamond. It was less than half a minute before they reached the point where the lassoed youngster had last been visible, but all that they found was Brockett himself, still mixed up with the coils of a lariat, his shirt half-torn off, the waistband of his trousers ripped, and his pockets inside out. His assailants, whoever they might have been, had vanished into the chaparral, and the crackling of the underbrush gave evidence that they were rapidly widening the distance between themselves and the avenging cavalry.

"What was it?" "Who roped you?" "Are you hurt?" the players chorused, as they picked up the rumped but uninjured centerfielder. Brockett, freed from the tangling rope, shook himself, made an effort to readjust his torn clothing, and then sat down on the grass, rocking with laughter.

"I'm not hurt," he explained, between spasms of merriment, "but I



THE SPIDER! LOOK OUT FOR THE TARANTULA, BOY—LOOK OUT FOR THE SPIDER!

think somebody's feelings will be injured. Somebody is going to be badly stung."

"Your belt is gone!" cried Solano. "Yea. That's the best part of it," gurgled Brockett. "Half an hour before the game, not wishing to be too heavily weighted, I took my money, my packets of letters—everything of any value or any weight—and placed them in the safe at headquarters. The captain of Company F fixed it all up for me. That took two or three pounds and a lot of bulk off my waist, and gave me a chance to work more

freely. Whoever lassoed me wanted that belt. They jerked me in among these bushes, flung me on my face, and went through me in less than five seconds' time. And they got the belt, they got the belt, and ran away with it!" Brockett again collapsed with laughter.

"Didn't you see them at all, my boy?" questioned the chaplain.

"No, sir," Brockett replied. "They jerked me in here so fast I had no chance to turn, and then laid me face downward, so that I couldn't see them. They didn't even speak, but robbed me and were gone before I could even roll over and look after them. It was finely done—just the way the wild west melodramas used to have the Mexican villain lasso the heroic cowboy."

"Didn't they get anything besides the belt?" asked Solano.

"Yes, they did." And again Brockett was convulsed. "They got a nice set of nonsensical messages and faked ciphers that I put in four hours constructing on the train. I hope they get rich with their plunder."

An old trooper, a veteran of the plains, had pushed a short distance into the chaparral while this conversation was going on.

"There was three of 'em, sir," he reported to the captain of Company C. "Two was Mexicans, one a cheap fellow that didn't amount to much, and the other a vaquero, with new, high-heeled shoes, and a new black velvet jacket. His arm caught on some thorns, sir, and here's a bit of the goods. The third one was a lit-



SOMETHING SWISHED THROUGH THE AIR, AND SETTLED ROUND HIS SHOULDERS.

tle man—at least, his feet were very small—and he wore regular city shoes. That's all the trail tells, sir. I suppose they had horses the other side of this brush, and are a long ways from here by now."

Six troopers rode out, beating the chaparral, but with little hope of overtaking the lasso-throwers. The triumphant common citizens and the defeated cavalry returned to camp, exchanging much perelfage, and mapping out the preliminaries for the third game of the series. Brockett and Solano, assigned to a comfortable tent, started a debate as to the identity of their latest adversary.

"The fact that he was a small man, leaving a small track," said Solano, "seems to indicate that our Japanese friend swam out of the North river. Doesn't it look that way?"

"It surely does," assented Brockett. "Still, the German Baron may have a few small men as his confederates. That would be possible, wouldn't it?"

"The Baron is still locked up at Little Rock," objected Solano. "He would have considerable difficulty in directing any operations from the cell where we last saw him. I can't see anyone in this but the gentle Jap. Can you?"

"It appears to be some of his playful doings," said Brockett. "He has kept himself well under cover, though. The officers—who keep their eyes and ears open—all tell me that no Japanese gentlemen have been seen in this vicinity."

Solano smiled, significantly. "That may be—but did it ever occur to you that the average Chingman looks very much like the average Japanese? And there are quite a few Chingmen along the river, so I'm told."

The boys looked out of the tent and gazed upon the dreary panorama of brush, rock, sand and turbid river. Then, smitten with the pangs of excellent appetites and remembering an invitation to the eating-place of the war correspondents, they stepped over the threshold. A Mexican—poorly clad, miserable of appearance, intercepted them.

"I beg pardon, senores." "Tell it in Spanish, if you can't in English," said Solano, amiably. The Mexican at once started a brief, but energetic oration in the Castilian tongue, and wound it up by pressing a soiled piece of cardboard into Solano's hand.

To be continued